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SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON THE
PHILIPPINES

11. (U) Presidential press spokesman Ignacio R. Bunye on March 8 welcomed the State Department's Country Report on the Philippines in the annual human rights report to Congress as a "constructive criticism from a time-honored ally," admitting that "the Philippines has had a history of violence over the past decades that we aim to deal with and put in the past, adhering to strict standards of criminal justice and human rights, with justice under the rule of law; and we welcome all the assistance we can get from our allies and partners for a safer and more secure world." He described the Philippine government's additional steps to combat "unexplained killings," such as special courts and special prosecutors, an expanded witness protection program, and stricter internal controls within the military and police. He emphasized that the Philippines "upholds democracy and human rights as strongly as it cherishes freedom and free enterprise."

12. (U) The report received widespread media coverage, focusing on a "climate of impunity" related to unlawful killings of activists, church leaders, and journalists. Many reports also highlighted the report's conclusion that the New People's Army was responsible for the killing of local government officials, left-wing activists and civilians, and use of land mines and underage soldiers in combat roles.

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